

Embassy of the United States of America
Public Affairs Section
Old Mutual Building
P.O. Box 30016
Lilongwe 3, Malawi



Tel: (265) 1 772-222/414/992
Fax: (265) 1 771-142

United States Agency for International Development

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Contacts: Mitchell Moss - Public Affairs Officer
Anna Sparks - Development Outreach and Communications Specialist, USAID
Mayeso Chirwa - Information Specialist

Increasing Family Planning Services to Save Lives in Malawi

The United States Government has provided an additional US\$1,000,000, equivalent to MK122,000,000, to support voluntary Family Planning Services in Malawi. The new funding will go towards an emergency shipment of condoms and other contraceptives that are needed to fill delayed shipments. These contraceptives are expected to help maintain the stock at the central medical stores until the Ministry of Health can take over the ordering and delivery of family planning supplies for Malawi.

Family planning saves lives and has long been considered a key aspect of development. It is a critical component of reproductive health programs and the national agenda. At present, a Malawian woman has six children on average, one of the highest fertility rates in the world.

However, the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) indicates that most Malawians (both men and women) want fewer children. This is an indication that there is a significant need for family planning information and services. Because of the significant health risks associated with unwanted fertility and the demand for family planning shown by the MDHS, the U.S. Government is providing this support to reinvestigate interest in family planning.

In Malawi, family planning is especially important since giving birth can be life-threatening. In 1800 of every 100,000 live births, mothers die during childbirth. Sierra Leone is the only country in the world that has a worse rate. In addition, hundreds of Malawian women suffer or die from abortions performed in dangerous conditions because they did not have access to family planning information prior to pregnancy.

But mothers are not the only ones who suffer from high fertility rates. Children also suffer. Young girls without access to family planning information have children too early requiring them to drop out of school to care for their babies. Families that have children too closely spaced often don't have the time or money to feed and care for their children properly. This can lead to significant numbers of malnourished children and a high child mortality rate. According to the World Health

Organization, Malawi has one of the worst child death rates in the world. 189 Malawi children per 1000 die before reaching the age of five.